

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

O.H 38

DAWSON, JOHN

Interviewed by
Patricia Young
April 21, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN DAWSON

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

DATE: 21 April 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: This is an interview with John Dawson for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project by Patricia Young on April 21, 1980, at ten o'clock in the morning, at Desert Horizons Country Club in Indian Wells.

I think we can begin this morning by talking about first of all how you came to the desert because I don't think I know.

JD: Well, back in 1940's we all came down from, all the golfers came down from Los Angeles to play in the Annual Thomas O'Donnell Golf Tournament which was at Palm Springs, that little nine-hole course, and it was a fun tournament. They had a big chance for the pool at the time, and we came down just about the week before Easter, and we had a lot of fun. And I became enamored with the desert at that time and couldn't figure out why they hadn't more golf facilities being such a beautiful climate

and so forth. So at that time I was working in Los Angeles in the industrial real estate business and it was a lot of smog and everything, and I said, what am I doing here. Why shouldn't I get out to where there's clean air? So therefore I decided to take the big jump and cashed in my insurance policy and at that time Thunderbird Ranch was available to develop. It was a dude ranch. And we conceived the idea of changing it into a golf course. It had a clubhouse and it had a swimming pool and it had a room for, to build a golf course and so we changed over from the horseback riding days to the golf days. That was the big change in the desert. And that was a very interesting time. That ~~that~~ was the first eighteen-hole course that was developed here. Before that time there wasn't adequate golf facilities. All we had, people came here to lay in the sun and just to sort of be lazy and everything. But at that time we brought in golfers from all over the world and all over the country, particularly, and they enjoyed themselves and that was the start of what probably the golf we're seeing today. Now we have over, I think, forty some golf courses, and we'll probably have continual more. We are particularly blessed with the sunshine,

and we're blessed with a lot of water. Very few people understand the water situation here in the desert, which is most interesting. We have lists, when I first came here in 1940s the water used to come to the surface over in North Palm Springs and again in Indian Wells, so that you can imagine how there's a basin. And it was blocked off at Indian Wells by a fault that runs across the desert. So at that time there was ample water, water for everything. And when we put the first golf course in and drilled a well the farmers were quite annoyed with us. They said we're using their water. Usually there's a, knowing what the water situation is, there's water in this desert for years and years to come. Now up to today over the last forty years I would say they've probably drilled for the golf courses and for the developments they've drilled, oh, maybe fifty, sixty wells, and they all produce a million gallons a day. So you can imagine what the drawing of the basin is. So therefore the water is, they're using about a third more water than they have here. Two-thirds of the water comes in from the natural flow from San Gorgonio, San Jacinto and the Taguitz Canyon up here and the natural sources. The other third they're importing from Colorado River and up in Northern California. They're brought in, they're

Whitewater, and then they're put into the basin here. So that is the, but as far as the water goes, there will be plenty of water for any number of developments they have from now on because actually when you take one of these ranches like this one here, particular, I'll just mention that, at Desert Horizons, we, this is a famous old ranch. It was all called the, we bought it from Ron Moran, but before he had it, it was the Arkell Ranch, Arkell Date Ranch. It was very famous and people were very nostalgic about it. And they had seven wells on this property, on the two hundred and seventy-four acres. When we acquired it and we had to cap for those wells, so we're using just a minor part of the water they used to use for the date production. So when they say we're using excess water, that's not right. So there's still a great amount of water on the desert. This has been a very interesting part of the desert to develop. Years ago we, when Palm Springs became fully developed and you had to go someplace, the wind kept you away from the middle of the desert so we kept up to these coves. And there's several coves on the way from Palm Springs to Indio. And there's a stretch in there of about twenty miles. Those were Cathedral City and El Dorado and

canyon country. Well, not canyon country because that was fully developed. Palm Springs and El Dorado and Indian Wells, and now we're here and La Quinta and all the way down to the, we tucked themselves into all the coves, keep away from that wind. And another thing, too, this part of the desert has been quite active lately because a lot of people, eastern people particularly, try to get away, get more sunshine. And they find they get an hour's more sun out this way. And naturally, as the land is used up, you have to move out. Probably the next big boom will be in years to come, it will be probably around about towards La Quinta. And there's a lot of beautiful land out that way. And Indio and all through there, just a beautiful valley. It's been very interesting to develop these things. And, as I say, El Dorado, for instance, was an old beautiful ranch, that was in dates and grapefruit and grapes. It was developed by Farmer Page, who got his money from the old, he was a famous old character. He got his money from Las Vegas gambling, and he put it over here into develop this property. And we negotiated with him and developed something that he was very proud of. He passed away shortly afterwards, but that's been a beautiful development.

And before that came into, after we developed Thunderbird, we had an early member there called Tall Tom. He was from Sacramento and he was a builder and sort of a man with good vision. And so he saw the need of another golf course here, so he developed the first nine holes of ✓ Indian Wells. And Eddie ~~suserrio~~ who was very popular at the time at the desert and one of our people that ran the pro shop at Thunderbird helped him. And they laid out a little nine-hole golf course. And subsequently ✓ they got John ~~Tacien~~ a fellow by the name of Johnson and several partners and developed a full Indian Wells complement. And it's been a very successful deal. Then we just finished the, last year we finished developing Marrakesh, which is a beautiful thing up on Portola. That's in Palm Desert. That's on a hundred and fifty-five acres. It's planned for that smaller type of golf course, but a beautiful little project, nice place to ✓ live. Then ~~Ironwood~~ came in, of course, three or four years ago, and done a very good job. That was Arnold Palmer and his group. And I think that's now financed by the General Electric Pension Fund. A tremendous thing. What they did was to acquire the flood control property with the stipulation that they couldn't build in there.

They had to build on a higher land. So it's the only golf course in the whole desert area that is probably it has a lot of nature that goes with it. It's like the wildlife. It's above the wildlife property. And it's very scenic and very beautiful. And the homes are built around the outside perimeter as you approach it. It's an outstanding development. Then we also have in this way of Thunderbird we also have the Springs which is a nice course. It's across from the Eisenhower Medical Center. That had a lot of influence on this area, the Eisenhower Medical Center. Brought a lot of people out this way. And there's a lot of elderly people in the desert now and middle-aged people and so they're very anxious to get close to shopping, close to medical facilities and therefore there is no other place in the world that I know of that has the closeness with all those facilities together. It's what's bringing people in here from all over. It's probably the nicest and the safest place to live that I know of. Then, of course, you go on the way to Indio and they're developing now; La Quinta's been a very popular place. They've developed that over the last few years and they're also building new facilities there. Landmark people are putting a new

thing around the hotel. So this part of the desert is becoming very popular. I'd say that there's a lot of nostalgia around this part of the desert. People prefer, the oldtimers prefer, seeing, they don't like the development. They'd prefer seeing the old ranches, and they feel they've lost a little portion of the desert. When we developed this, we were very careful when we transplanted all these five thousand date trees. So we have all the date trees that we originally started with here. And besides that, we planted another two thousand because at that time there was a committee here called Save The Dates. And people that used to drive from Indio along the highway here, 111 Highway towards Palm Springs, they didn't like to see all these dates torn down. So actually there's more dates today than there ever was destroyed, but they're farther down there. In the valley they're further down *through these* But we have tried to preserve the natural beauty of the dates and people love to drop by. And even though they don't produce, they like to see them anyway. So the, my good friends here as you go developed a lot of, who had a lot of ranches in this area here, this was a beautiful ranch area. Grapes and grapefruit and all sorts of things.

And they have gradually been pushed farther into the valley with their developments, and actually they weren't in business to make money. They were in the business to hobby. I know, for instance, Ted Braun, who owned one of our big ranches around the El Dorado, he had a grape ranch. And he just loved to come down here in the spring of the year and see the grapes growing and the harvesting and he'd sing songs with the Mexicans and he had a big time. So, but all those, that area is gone. Some ways it's too bad, and some ways it isn't. When more people discover an area and they like it, you've got to take care of them. So we've been constantly looking for a scenic piece of property and that we could do a good job with and make it look nice and so forth, and people have been very happy with what we've done, which I'm very pleased about. I'm sort of a little unhappy that the desert has grown so fast, I suppose, like everybody else is. But Los Angeles has grown too and where I used to live in Chicago has grown, so you can't help progress. But this is a very, very beautiful part of the desert. And the whole desert, this map, will still be beautiful because as we develop this and get over into the Indio area, there's some land down there that's just as beautiful

as this is. And it's now agriculture. And it hasn't been discovered yet. It will be discovered. Around, I'm talking about the land in between south of 111 and back to the mountains, in that whole big area in there. It's a lovely area. It's beautiful, wonderful water. They have the canal water down there, which we don't have here. And they have wells, and they have soil, and it's right next to the agricultural empire, so I think it has a great future. The State has put in that big dam up there and big lake up there, and has been very popular up on Jefferson. And that area now between Washington and Jefferson is a very, very live area, what you'd call very live. People are studying it and acquiring property, and that will be the next big boom. Most of us keep away from the desert area itself because the desert is a funny place. It's building two sections. It's built to the north section. They have plenty of water over there by Highway 10. And then there's a sort of a hump in the middle of the desert and there's no water in there. And then there's water over here, so there's two, in this area of six or seven miles, there's two sources of water on both sides and none in the center. So it's very important to get on either one side or the other. I think more important than the wind.

PY: When you say the center, what did you mean?

JD: It's a sort of a hogback, this desert is. Goes from Palm Springs to Indio. If you drew a rectangle there and you, here's a valley and here's a valley over here. Now this piece here doesn't have any water in there. So this Palm Springs, this is Indio here, and this is where we are here, these little coves. This has a lot of water here, and there's water here. Now the reason this has water over here on the north side is because the San Andreas fault line runs down there, that big earthquake fault. And the water hits that fault and then runs down and runs down into the Salton Sea. So . . .

PY: That's on the other side of Interstate 10 there?

JD: That's on the other side, yes. That's the . . . they have tried to develop that area for years, and it never has developed as fast as this part of the desert because it's a little windy up there. And they do have one thing up there that we don't have, they have hot water. I wish we had that over here. But they've done a pretty good job of developing. They started with the coffee years ago. There was an oldtimer that developed the hot springs up in Hot Springs Village up there. But that's gone down, blocked from there because they have all ranches all the

way down to Indio. They're starting to develop those now, which the Jack Ivey Ranch is going to be one of them. And Gene Autry owns some property over there. And people ^{who} have developed Rancho Bernardo, own a lot of property over there. So there's substantial holdings that will be eventually developed. There's a little bit of a barrier between this side of the valley and the other side because you have to cross over the wind. And we who get very little wind on the desert, but when we do get it, it's spectacular. We might get eight or ten days of wind a year. It's the least windy place in the world that I've ever been. But some of this is very spectacular. The sand blows and you want to keep inside. But I was born and raised in Chicago, and played a lot of golf and everything in Texas. And the wind blows every day down there. And it blows every day in Chicago pretty near. So we don't have . . . you can go months and months and months without any wind here at all. Unfortunately, we get, the wind comes, what wind we get here comes about this time of the year which is three or four days. But October and November, December and all through the year you get no wind at all.

PY: Can you elaborate some on the actual construction of

Thunderbird, yes, Thunderbird Country Club because I understand that that was a real innovation in golf clubs and the whole idea of living near the course.

JD: Well, Thunderbird Club, was, I'd say it developed in 1949, started in 1949 and probably got fully opened about 1950 or 1951, and at that time, it was Frank Bogert, our mayor here, was the, during the war and he was in the Navy and one of his best friends, Joe Eedy, the Eedy Candy Company from San Francisco, asked him what he would like to do when he got out of the Navy. He said, "Well, I've always wanted to own a dude ranch, a horse dude ranch." And Joe said, "Why don't you go ahead and give me the figures and I'll see that it gets started." So Frank did, and hired Gordon Kaufman as an architect to do the buildings and so forth. They built twenty rooms and the swimming pool and a kitchen and a little tack room and so forth and a corral in front. And he started that with the start of Thunderbird. Way out in the country in those days. And then when they built it, it got to be a little bit more expensive than they thought it would, and so they took in partners. And Eedy took in Paul Brown from San Francisco and Gilmore, Gilmore Steel Company from San Francisco, and Bill Jason,

Jason Carpenter Company from San Francisco. And they had several partners, so they were truly treating it as a, they had it four or five years and they were having fun with it. And supposed to be making a profit but they weren't. They were losing about fifty thousand a year, so I guess Uncle Sam told them that to either divert themselves of it or run it as a business. So I came along about that time, and that was in 1949, and conceived the idea of, they had enough land around it so I could build a golf course and then use the facilities they had. So we did that, and that was the start of Thunderbird. Luckily, it was set back from the road enough so they had a corral in front of there so we could get by with our third hole there at Thunderbird, second hole at Thunderbird. So it worked out very well. It immediately became popular. And I think I was a little unpopular with the horse riders about that time, although the first two or three years we had Thunderbird crowded, we all rode horses, all had western outfits, and it was sort of a, it was the changeover from the horse riding community to a golf community was. And then right after that, about two years after Thunderbird started, then Tamarisk started. And that's been very successful.

That's the one club in the desert that do not stay open for dinner at night. They just have it as a daytime operation. And they have special parties, and it's probably one of the most successful clubs in the desert. Very good.

PY: Why is it more successful than the other clubs?

JD: Well, I think the average club in the desert has a hard time competing with restaurants that stay open every night. And the average club only opens about two nights a week. It's pretty hard to keep help. It's pretty hard to hire a chef. It's pretty hard to have big nights and then nobody at all. So Thunderbird is probably the most active of all; next to Tamarisk Thunderbird is the most active club. They keep going every night. They're open every day of the week. But outside of that, the other clubs are not. It's a rather difficult job to run a country club when you don't know who's going to come to dinner and who isn't going to come to dinner. A restaurant can very well figure out what their daily take is or daily patronage is, and a club doesn't, sometimes there won't be a soul in the club and other times there will be a hundred and fifty, two hundred people there. So it's pretty hard to order food and run a decent operation.

PY: Why was there a need for Tamarisk if Thunderbird . . .

JD: Well, there was a big need for Tamarisk because at the time we opened Thunderbird, all of a sudden everybody around the country and Southern California and everything, discovered, well, my gosh, here's a place to play golf. At that time, before that time, they were trying to get into the little old down and out golf course and that was more or less a private course. That was Tom O'Donnell's and his friends, there was a group of what they called the Twenty-five Group there. And they didn't exclude golfers, but there was this, it was pretty hard to get on, so forth. And when we built Thunderbird, that was the, everybody came down here to play golf then. So they decided it, there was enough people for two golf courses. So those were very trying days, by the way. They flocked in there by the hundreds, all of a sudden. We only had room for about, when we first started Thunderbird, we had room for about two or three hundred golfers and we had, in those days it was different than it is now. One of the strangest things going back in those days, we'd never close until two in the morning because that was the law. You know, you had to close, but now they go home at nine-thirty, ten o'clock at night.

That's a big deal. Then we started to, after we built Thunderbird the first year we had, we started a first, we didn't call it the Bob Hope Classic then, but it was ✓ the first desert classic. We had the *All these* Benny Hogan, ^{*Man Kenwood*} Lloyd Mangrum, we had the Texas big tournaments ✓ for the *Calcutta* pools and immediately got the thing started, and just jammed it up solid. And we then had the *Ryder* cup match, the International *Ryder* Cup Match, and the, we had the honor of having that twice, once at El Dorado and once at Thunderbird which is very exceptional. And there just got too many golfers for one golf course. And that's happened ever since. Tamarisk went in, then Indian Wells went in, and this one went in and that one went in. And a lot of them, about I would say half of them are promotional deals, but the other half are needed, where they actually need them.

PY: What do you mean a promotional deal?

JD: Well, promoting real estate. They're put in there to promote, to sell the real estate around them. And very frankly, the interesting thing of Thunderbird, talking about that, the early development is that Thunderbird Ranch, Thunderbird was a, we called it Thunderbird Ranch

and Country Club. The reason we did that was because we didn't drill a well. We used the old ranch well, and it was a ranch. So we just added the name country club to sort of the switch over. And about that time, it was pretty near all single family homes around the golf course, but we saw the need around the clubhouse for a place for people to stay. And outside of those twenty rooms we had, so we built those first cottages, fifteen cottages there. I think that was the first cottage here on the desert. I believe it was. And the fact they didn't know what to call it at that time. Didn't call them condominiums, they didn't call them planned unit developments or anything. But I went up to Riverside and I said, this is what I want to do, and even they didn't know what I was talking about. It was building a cottage and then giving a person just enough land around, and we took care of all the land in between. We call them now condominiums or planned unit developments and so forth. But I only sold those to, I sold those to out-of-state people and just what it cost us for. At that time just our building costs, I built those cottages for, three-bedroom cottages for, eighteen thousand dollars. Then used the other two thousand dollars for furnishing

them. And I sold those to the people in Chicago, they gave me the twenty thousand dollars, and I let them use them one month a year free. And then when we rented them from the other eleven months, after the rent went to them to retire their twenty thousand dollars, and half went to me for the operation. Most successful deal.

So at the end of about eight years, the club got all those cottages for nothing besides all the rent they got in the meantime. That's one of their most lucrative deals today. But it's surprising what you do when you have no money. You figure out schemes. But that was very nice.

✓ There was a fellow by the name of Barney *Gingibayh* from Chicago was playing in there one of my first. He said, why don't you build me a, you got room. Why don't you build me a cottage here. He said, I'm going to stay out here for at least a month a year. So that was the idea what we started with, and we had room for fifteen cottages. So that's a combination of cottages and the lots. I think that was the first one. Now Tamarisk came in right after we did, and they went all lots, no cottages. And then, let me see, Indian Wells got all lots, no cottages. And then we came in later with El Dorado, El Dorado's a combination again. I was

still trying to force, change the rules a little bit, and get away from the building of homes because when you sell a lot and you don't build a home yourself, you have a hodgepodge development sort of unless you have tremendous architectural restrictions because you don't control the building that goes it. But here we control all the buildings. See, we control all the, we don't let a person touch the outside of the building here on any of these newer developments. So if it's badly done, then you're responsible for it. But if you let everybody build what they want to, we got into some big fights in the early days of Thunderbird because we had some people that came in there that had no taste at all and built the most horrible things you ever looked at. We never lived them down. And the same thing happened at Tamarisk. So we prefer to do them this way where we can at least control them here. We have community pools and we don't let them build their own pool here and so forth. And we're always trying to keep about five years ahead of what, how people are going to be forced to live and not how they want to live because now we're being forced to live different than we were years ago. We have the energy crisis coming on us. We have the, we have

to design less glass. We have to design overhang roofs. We have to design, try to keep away from this, the air conditioning and so forth. We're getting back to the old Mexican style of building which is thick walls, big overhangs. And it's very nice to get in the sun here, but it's very nice to get out of it, too. The eastern people come out here to get the sun and we come out here to get away from it sometimes. They don't realize this. They say, well, we'd like, we have about three hundred and fifty-five days of sunshine a year, and that's a lot. And they, Seattle or Chicago and so forth, they don't have any sunshine, so, very little. So they're tickled to get out in the sun, but we're not. When you live with it all year, it's pretty rough.

PY: What was the emphasis for the development of El Dorado?

JD: At the time we built Thunderbird, then we filled up that club. You might say we filled it up with members. And then Tamarisk came along and they practically filled theirs up. Well, right about that time the two backers I had, two principle backers with Thunderbird, were Don McCulla and George Cameron. I shouldn't say that because there were probably thirty or forth investors there, and it was a cumbersome deal to put together. So about that

time I became very friendly with George Cameron, who was very important to the desert at that time, and Bob McCulla. And they, we all thought that it was time for another golf club. So we picked out a piece of land where the old Dunes gambling place used to be, out of Cathedral City, goes north from there. There's a beautiful piece of property there, and I kept my eye on it, and it had a date grove in back of it where I could go through to a big drive and take out the dates and landscape the golf course and everything. So we started to assemble that property. And we were about halfway through assembling the whole thing when somebody presented, told us about El Dorado, the El Dorado Ranch. And I came out here and one of my investors, George Cameron, said, "Oh, that's too far out. I don't want anything to do with it." But Bob McCulla came out and looked at it, and he said, "Oh, this is gorgeous. Let's throw the other thing away and start this." So he, that's what we did. We finally acquired the El Dorado Ranch at that time, and then started building the concept and the golf course. It was a gorgeous ranch. We had to move a lot of grapefruit trees and move a lot of date trees and everything. And we got rid of the grapes, but it was a

gorgeous piece of property and we had an idea on it. My fun is in finding the property that has some beauty to it, and then making a plan for that particular piece of property, whether it's Seven Lakes is a hundred acres, Americus is a hundred and fifty-five acres. This is two hundred and seventy-four acres. El Dorado is, that cove at El Dorado, is about three hundred and fifty acres, so it's fun to take a piece of land and to see what you can do with it. There are pretty near all ~~ulas~~ formulas; you have to work out a formula that works. Where the money invested pays back and makes some sort of profit. And then make people happy, too, and build what they want them to. El Dorado has been probably the most successful club in the United States, and if you went there today, that was built sixteen, seventeen years ago, if you went to El Dorado today, it's the most modern building in the United States, right today. And we built that during the days of Eisenhower when he was president, and we had a lot of special things in there like secret communication rooms. And then we started, I think we started, Donald started golf course things in the country. We started the new innovation we had all through the thing. There was probably more thought given

to that club than any of the others because of the presence of Eisenhower and so forth. But it's a beautiful club, very well done. I wouldn't say it's the best, but it's the most modern. It's modern today and twenty years from now it will still be modern. And this project here we're trying to do, we're trying to pick up from where we left off there and do the things we, that have been acquired in the last fifteen years or so like security systems and so forth. Now we didn't have, we had one there, but we didn't have one that was near like they have today. We have the finest security system in the world here today, but now the way the electronic business is going, maybe next year somebody will have a better one than we will. And up until we had one, the Springs had the best. Then we think we got one a little bit better than the one they have, and somebody else will have a better one than we have. And that's the way it goes. But we've paid particular attention . . . That is the main thing that people want today, they want security. They live in Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland. They say, come out here and tell us, well, it's like living in a jungle down there. They're afraid of this and afraid of that, so we like to build a project with a wall around it,

gate house for protection, security system so they can press the little zinnia or anything they want to and get immediate help, either from the gate house or from the hospital. That's another important thing. If a person is by themselves and they're inclined to have some heart trouble or something, they don't have to worry about getting help immediately. You can get help here within one minute. So that's a very important feature today. The most important feature of anything I can tell you about. If you don't have security, you have nothing today because we're living in an age where it's getting more dangerous all the time. And people are accosted when they shouldn't be and so forth. And they come out here to retire and to be peaceful and quiet, and they want it that way. The desert is a very healthy place. It's a very wonderful place to live.

PY: What kinds of innovations did these clubs bring to golf courses and to country club living as they developed, starting with Thunderbird?

JD: Well, everybody comes here from around the country that I've seen the last several years, and they say, gee, why don't you do something like this in Oklahoma or why don't you do something like this in Denver. Why don't you do

something like this in New York? And foolishly, I've for back around 1954, Barren Weekly magazine came out with a big article about how things were done, how to make money in real estate and so forth and it's the worst thing that could have happened because everybody in the country called me and they wanted me to build a golf course and build one of these things back in their country. Well, it isn't so easy because these are designed for California living. They're not designed for Denver or Oklahoma or so forth. And I went back to New York and did a deal for the Rockerfellers and back there and right overlooking West Point. And it was very cumbersome because I was supposed to be the expert on that. And then we had a golf course designer from Florida, and we had a land planner from Denver. Well, we all met back there periodically, once a month, and I found out that it was the most cumbersome thing that I've ever got into. Unless you watch these things daily, you just can't do them right because they have their idea in land planning and I have my ideas on when I want to put the whole project together including the golf course and everything, so I found it better to work out here in California and know what you're doing and to get a

man that could work with you that is a land planner, is an engineer, is an architect and the whole thing together. And then you try not to make any mistakes that way. But it's a very difficult thing to . . . there's a lot of these projects being tried around the country and they hire an architect, the best architect they can hire, they hire a land planner, they hire this, but they're all separate. There's no cohesion to them, and they have occasional meetings and it ends up with either the land planner overwhelms the golf course architect, or the golf course architect overwhelms the land planner. So it doesn't work out. We know this climate, and we know what our capabilities are, and we know how much water we have. We know our marks and so forth. And if we went to Denver, I wouldn't know what I'm doing in Denver. I wouldn't know what I'm doing in New York. And I wouldn't know what I'm doing in Kansas City. If I tried to copy this project in Kansas City, I'm going to fall flat on my face. I wouldn't know what I'm doing. And they wouldn't like it back there anyway. They'd say they'd like it, but the people that own the land say, who don't you do this back there, but the people you're selling to, you can't take a person from Oklahoma City. I was going

to do one there years ago. And this real estate man drove me down two whole blocks of multimillionaire homes, I think everything over a million dollars, and they're all owned by widows, living in one or two rooms. He said, why don't you do something like this so they can be friendly with each other. And this is miserable. They're all living by themselves like hermits in these houses, but I was just about ready to do it back there. And I think I was going to make a mistake because in the first place, what were you going to do with all those old homes, and what if they didn't like the way I was living out here. So we gave that up. I think that's a big mistake to copy something here and put it back in New York. Just like if a New York, I copied something and put it back here, it wouldn't go over. We tried that, well, today, Desert Isle over here, that piece of property was owned by a friend of mine, and he kept after me every year to copy what they're doing in New York. That was the fresh metal deal back there. A building with a golf course around it. And I admitted to him that was the best kind I'd ever seen because it has total security. It has the, as you come through the gate, and then the buildings were all in the center and the golf

course goes around with lakes and everything, and high-rise. But I told him, I said at that time, people will not buy a high-rise in the desert. They just won't do it. So he wouldn't listen to me, and finally got someone to go ahead with the deal. And Safeco Insurance backed him on it, and he went ahead with it. And they couldn't give them away for two or three years. It's now very successful because they learned how to merchandise it. They learned that the only way to sell it was to go back to Chicago and back to New York or a place where they're used to living and high-rise. But the desert bucked it tremendously. They bucked it to the extent that I don't think they'll ever allow another one. However, it is very successful today. It's a very beautiful project. But people come here to be on the ground. They want to be flat, and they want to have rooms over them. They want to have views, and they don't want anybody to block the sun away from them. They had some big arguments on that one. Is it going to block my sun. Is it going to block this, so those things you've got to be careful of because we are entirely different than anyplace that I know of in the country. We just can't copy these. If you did this in Denver, you don't have the sun. We

provide big patios, and we provide every room has its own little patio or any lounging place. Well, there's no need for that back east if you want to shut yourself up there. You want to do the opposite from what we're doing and close the blinds and live and turn the fire on. But people don't understand that when they want you to do these things. They get enamored with what we have out here and think they'd like it back east. But they wouldn't like it.

PY: Did the golf course have to be developed differently in this area?

JD: Yes, we've done this . . . people complain here, I would say, if there is a complaint in the golf in the desert. They complain about it being flat and uninteresting, so we decided that we would do something entirely different here. We decided we'd do a lot of rolls and lakes and waterfalls and a lot of sidelines and a lot of interesting things, which we have done here. They seem to like that. It's been very popular so far. And I think they've, I can't say why, the other golf courses probably didn't do it that way, I think one of the reasons was they were sort of saving expenses a little bit. It's much easier to do a flat golf course, grading everything

and to, than to do what we did here. The reason we have so many rolls out here is because we had, the secret of all these deals, if you have a hundred acres, the secret is to not bring any land in and not take any out. It's what they call an earth moving. You don't take a spoonful of earth out and you don't see them pull in. That was the way you do it. And here we had a very wonderful chance to, we had all these big lakes here. We've got lakes that are thirty feet deep, so we had that land to deal with. We had to get rid of it some way. So we did ✓the *Rolls* and . . . In fact, the old Moran Ranch down there, you can see those two big trees in the distance. It's very interesting. Everybody said, what did you do with that old ranch. See these two big trees out there, way out there?

PY: Oh yes.

JD: Cottonwoods.

PY: Yes.

JD: Everybody said, what did you do with the old ranch, and I said, well, if you're playing golf out there and you walk over one of those mounds, you'll know it's down below there about twenty feet. We just bulldozed it and buried it. And the swimming pool, hated to do that, but

it was a beautiful ranch, but we couldn't, it was different architecture, we couldn't, it was just, in our way, what we're doing, so that shows the extent of the knobs and so forth. But we had to do that for the lakes and build the pads up and so forth. See this unit here that you're looking at is about ten, fifteen higher than the golf course. We had to scoop the golf course out and put the land up in here. But in the final analysis, when this is all finished, that will all come out exactly even. We don't truck anything in, we don't truck anything out. So it's a very fascinating, and they couldn't have done that a few years ago. They couldn't have done Thunderbird because they have all these new electronic deals and radar things and years ago when we had a piece of land, a mountainous piece of land, we took off the knobs and built up the valleys to make it a flat piece of land. And if you missed that by ten percent either way you were lucky. Ten percent fill or ten percent cut, so now they have these new machines that used to be all done by human calculation. Now they got these new machines. They just put a radar there and they figure out what type of soil it is and how deep it is and it's amazing. They don't miss it by one percent, which is why

they can do things today they couldn't do. And then we have all these big tremendous DA tractors and so forth. They're huge. They're giant things. They move so much earth. Years ago we used to, when I first started, we had to do that with a mule and what they called a skip loader, little thing you worked by hand. And you would be forever building a golf course like this if you did that.

PY: Is that how you built Thunderbird?

JD: Thunderbird, we built that with, that was in the early days of the tractor, not the mule, but the early days of what they called little bit of a tractor. And they pushed that soil around there to build the greens up and everything. And we used, at that time, we used all the desert soil, which we don't use today. We use, this is all, this soil is all treated and we don't use any soil, only desert soil, all in the greens or tees. That's all manufactured soil. It's all a lot of peat moss and wood chips and so forth, all mixed together. And you wouldn't dare use the desert soil in the green because that has a lot of clay in it. And that's what you're fighting here. But it's all scientific today. It's amazing. You take a piece of land like this, and when we started to grade it, the, this doer, English boy

that does the grading. He does all the golf courses all over the world. He has all the big equipment, so forth. He's an expert on it. He said, Mr. Dawson, you have the best soil I've ever seen in my life here. I said, yes, that's for you but not for me. I said, for you for pushing it around with a tractor that's fine. It's just like nothing. But for I, I've got to grow grass on it. And I said, we have a lot of clay in this soil, and I don't like that clay. And so what we did right away, we brought in a grader of ground last year, a fellow that deals with these conditions, and he told us, he took
✓ down of soil samples all over the place here. We found out what we've lacked in the soil, and

TAPE 1, SIDE 2:

JD: I was born and raised in Chicago, and since I've been in golf, I've played a lot of exhibition matches with Hagen and Kirkwood and ~~gelden~~ *gelden + those days* opening new golf courses, and we would play, oh, five or six years after a golf course was opened, you'd have to look around for a blade of grass to put your . . . and here this is fully developed in six months. It's in absolutely perfect condition. They wonder how you can do it. Well, one

thing is the weather out here. That's one thing. But the other is the scientific way you do it. It's like farming today. You've got to know what you're doing. With massive farming, you've got to put the right elements in the soil which it needs if it's worn out. And that's the same with this. It's a very intensive study. And you've got to do that before you grow grass because you wouldn't know what's in the soil. And they even go so far as to analyze the water to see what contents the water has in it. If it has any nitrogen, phosphorus, or what it has in it. Strange enough in this desert, they have two types of water. They have the one that comes from San Geronio and one comes from San Jacinto, and they cross in the desert. And that plays tricks on you. You've got to watch that, too. That's the fun of the whole thing, I think, is trying to outwit nature a little bit.

PY: What did you do with these earlier courses when you didn't have all this scientific.

JD: We just built them, and that's why some of them are in trouble today because we built them, we built the, most of them have been done over again. Thunderbird has been done over, and about to do it over again. And Tamarisk

has been done over. The architect from here helped do Tamarisk. The natural desert soil runs into, all soil turns into clay after so many years, no matter what it is. It starts with a mountain, it erodes down like a piece of rock, it chips off and grinds up and everything, and it comes down, but eventually it turns to clay. And you're fighting that because when clay gets hard, you can't get any water through it or you can't get any air through it or anything. It's like a person drowning. You see, you need air and you need water to grow plants. So you're continually putting peat moss in there or changing that character of the soil into where it flocculates, where it opens up. And if you don't do that, you're just in trouble. You get hard places on it and you get no growth. You get weak growth and everything else. So in the early days we didn't know what we do today. Science has brought a wonderful *ground to us* today. And all these people who sell fertilizer and seed and so forth, they know all those things. They know that sulfur does that, and they know that these things do it and so you have the knowledge today that we didn't have thirty, forty, fifty years ago. Been very interesting what way. And today, as I told you awhile ago, we don't

use any but the desert soil for the greens at all. We use entirely manufactured soil which is a combination of things. We can't do that on the golf course itself because that would be too expensive. But what we do on the golf course, we take analysis of what kind of soil it is and we treat it with sulfur and things that are going to completely open up that soil and bring the PH, which is down to, our desert soil runs about eight point seven, and neutral is seven. And we're trying to get down to the acid side all the time. Now Honolulu, strange enough, is all acid, see. That's why everything is so beautiful there. Volcanic, but we're just the opposite here. We're on the alkaline side. So our trouble is to continually fight that and we take these probes all the time. And if we get above that seven, we're in trouble. We're trying to knock that down all the time. And it's a continual process. And, for instance, we started out with this soil here, we would recommend probably putting two thousand pounds of sulfur per acre and then after you do that, the initial thing, each year you do a five hundred pound, that sort of maintains it right. But you couldn't build a golf course like this years ago because immediately you would have

all these knobs that would be hard and dry places. You wouldn't have any grass on them at all. Because you put the sprinkler on there, and if the water can't get through it, it just runs into the valleys. So you'd have all wet places and dry places. So that's influenced the architecture a great deal. Then another thing, too, that's influenced a lot of things, we built in all these land traps today so that you can rake them with an automatic rake. That's the man who rides on them. And years ago, it used to take you two men all day to rake a sand trap. Well, you can't do it. Labor is so high today. You've got to do things real fast way. All of our trees, and you see those trees out there, there's five thousand of them that we planted, and those were all planted so many feet apart, twenty-four feet apart, so you can get that big gang over there that he, now he's going so he can ride that thing and without getting off, he can go between the trees. There's no hand labor anymore. It's very, very expensive to maintain these golf courses today and you're continually looking for methods to shortcut that tremendous, tremendous cost. When I was first building golf courses, the rule of thumb was, oh, forty, fifty years ago, ten thousand dollars a

hole. That's a hundred and eighty-thousand dollars for an eighteen-hole golf course. And now the sprinkling system alone costs twice that much without anything else. So it costs probably a million and a half, two million dollars to build a golf course today. So you're always looking for a method to cut down your expenses no matter what it is. And not get in trouble with labor.

PY: How much of an influence do you feel the golf courses and the country clubs have had on living in the area?

JD: Oh, I think they've had everything because I go back to the days when we first came here, there was nothing to do in Palm Springs. You came here to play tennis; Charlie Farrell started the racket club. And he and Ralph Bellamy did a wonderful thing because you play tennis or you laid in the sun. And it started the whole movie crowd over there. Well, lately golf has outdone tennis by a lot, and outdone riding by a lot. And so the old Smoketree Ranch was a typical example. See, when I first came here, Smoketree Ranch was, they had no grass, they had no swimming pools, they had nothing. ✓ Mrs. *MASKME* who did that, she believed that the desert should be kept a desert, so she put into her restrictions, no swimming pools, no grass, no lawns, no nothing. She

wanted it dry, dry, and get the nice warm thermals of the desert. Well, when I started the golf courses, the eastern people came out here, they didn't want that. They wanted to see green grass. They wanted to see an oasis on their, within their, they wanted the desert as a whole to get thermals, but they wanted in that particular project to have green grass and a regular little Shangri-la. So that changed the whole concept of the desert. Smoketree Ranch is still the old Smoke-tree. They have partly lawns and partly swimming pools and partly this and partly that, which has gone away from their original concept. But the rest of the desert, every one of these projects, the greener you can get them the better off you are. And if you take a helicopter and fly over this desert up in the air, you'll find out that the desert is still a lot of desert here, tremendous amount. People say, well, they're ruining the desert. They're doing all this greening, but that's not so. If you'll get, the higher up you get, the more desert you will see. And the desert is a tremendous amount of desert. And you still get the warm thermals. You get down towards Indio, you get some of the ranching, and that's where they have these immense farms and lot of water in them.

That's a different story. But this is just a little dot in the desert. The desert as a whole is hundreds of thousands of acres, and all forever will be undeveloped because, as I told you, of the dry places of the desert there's a hump in there, there's no water. So unless they transport it in there in time to come, which I don't think they will. But the, I think we're going overboard in making the desert too green. I think we're too conscious of that. As a golf player, I've played a lot in Phoenix and Tucson in Arizona, now some of the finest golf courses in the world were over there. They like to play for the *Touss there* because they weren't green grass. They're brown, and they're easy to hit shots from. And here these might look perfect to you, but they're not a good playing condition for a golf course. So I think we've gone overboard too much in making them look too green. And it costs a lot of money, too. But they're buying scenery and they're buying to come out here to see green grass and flowers and see what the flight is for them. You can leave Chicago in a snow storm, come out here and see this green grass, it makes more of an impression on you. Very interesting to work in the desert here. It's a fascinating thing. It's hard work.

It's very gratifying to see how much people enjoy it.

And they're coming in here now from all over the world and all over the country. And I don't know, it's endless.

PY: Initially, though, was it hard to get people to invest, say, in Thunderbird when you wanted them to?

JD: Very difficult. In fact, I don't know whether I should tell you or not, but Thunderbird was starting, as I told you, when I came along. I knew what their problems were going to be, and they had to divest themselves of the, Uncle Sam maybe called it a plaything. You can't have an investment for more than four years without showing a profit of some kind. Well, they were showing a loss of fifty thousand every year. And I knew they were going to have to get rid of it, so at that time I was looking for a golf course, but I didn't have any money. So I cashed in some insurance policies I had in Los Angeles, and I got myself together about fifteen, sixteen thousand dollars. Well, that was nothing. And a friend of mine, Barney Hinkle down here, he had about ten thousand, so with that we started Thunderbird. We negotiated and negotiated and negotiated over a period of years, so they were in trouble, we were in trouble. So we sort of formed a partnership and I said, let me have the golf

course, and I'll put a golf course in there, take it off your hands, the buildings. And they allowed me to do that and allowed me to tear the buildings apart, too, which is very exceptional. I give them an awful lot of credit. But I told them what I was going to do, and they were taking a chance. There was no other golf course here, but anyway, we started that thing. And then the next thing we'd do, that was to put it in escrow. And the next thing to do was go out and get some money to do what I wanted to do. Well, back in those days it didn't cost, as I say a hundred and eighty thousand dollars for the golf course. And we didn't do too much to the buildings. We tried to sell fifty units a stock to fifty different people for five thousand dollars apiece. And if they bought a share of stock, that entitled them to one of the estate lots around the golf course for two thousand dollars. That was our cost to develop them. So they had a total of seven thousand dollars invested. Well, I went up to Seattle because that was my *Mushio* market up there. And I came back without a single investor and I was discouraged. Then I went to Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and Randy Scott and Phil Harris. I conceived the idea, well, if I went to the movie people, they were in

those days they were in about the ninety-three percent bracket. Uncle Sam was taking ninety-three cents of every dollar they made. So I told Bob, I said, well, if you lose all your money, you're not going to lose much anyway. So that immediately caught on and I so I started out in selling to the movie people first. That is the friends of mine that I used to play golf with. And that ✓ started the ball rolling. Then I got Frank *Da bondedy* and Jens Hansen and just one after another came in when they saw that I was serious and going to do a good job. In the meantime, as soon as I got a little money in, we started to build the golf course. And it was a difficult procedure. People didn't know what they were investing and they were a little cautious at that time. Well, all the people that invested made fortunes because they immediately sold those lots. The longer they kept them, the more they sold them for. At least they sold them for seventy-five hundred dollars apiece for the lot alone. And then up to as high as twenty-five, thirty thousand dollars. I had George Montgomery and Dinah Shore. I had the whole ball of wax to begin with, the investors. Anybody that would come up with seven thousand dollars, I'd get ahold of. It sounds funny these days, but it

was difficult. And that was a very cumbersome deal because the more investors you have, the more people in the pot, and the more attorneys you have and the more CPA's you have, and we had quite a time. Then I'd gone from Thunderbird to the next deal I did was El Dorado, and then it was only fifteen general partners, so that wasn't so bad, or limited partners, rather. And then I went to, from there to Seven Lakes and then I only dealt with five. So I was getting down each year. And then this, Americus, was only four, so I got down. Now this one, of course, it was financed differently, this financed by a pension fund. All these deals now are, they have to be insurance companies or pension funds, there's so much money involved, up front money that you can't poor boy them anymore like we used to. It's taken a lot of the fun out of it, I'll say that.

PY: You know, El Dorado and Thunderbird look like they've really influenced the surrounding area. For instance, there's no commercial moving around lll around Thunderbird.

JD: No. Thunderbird, of course, that was Riverside County we were dealing with when we built Thunderbird. And the restrictions weren't too difficult then. But here, we're in Indian Wells. We're incorporated. See, all these

cities became incorporated afterwards. So we're in an incorporated village here in Indian Wells. And they're very, very tough on you. You can't do anything less than two thousand square feet, number one. So that influenced that right off the bat. And they, I attend a lot of meetings over here, and the public and the property owners in this little village you have here are adamant that they don't have any shopping here. It was so a couple of years ago, saying, well, there's one village on the desert we're going to have open space and we're not going to have any shopping here. They can shop other places, Palm Desert or Palm Springs, so forth. Well, that was a silly thing to say because times change a lot over the years. And to keep a city growing, you have to have some commercial. You have to have the sales tax thing. You have to have that. Well, they don't have any sales tax here at all now. So they had a meeting here about, oh I'd say, two months ago. And in the little city here of Indian Wells, you know, small area, they had five proposals for shopping centers. And the populace, it was a public hearing, and there was so many people there that voted against it, they threw it out, threw them all. About two months ago, they had another meeting.

And at that time they okayed a shopping center. That's the first one that's ever been okayed here. And probably the only one that will ever be okayed. And that's right down on El Dorado, El Dorado and 111. They had a split vote on that one, so it just really squeezed through. But knowing what was happening there, to keep the city going, they've got a fire department down here now, and they're going to have a city hall and so forth to keep that city growing, they're going to have to have some sales taxes over there. They recognize that, but the great majority of people here don't want any commercial at all. They don't mind hotels and things like that. I don't mean that commercial, but they don't like shopping centers. They don't like them. And I sort of agree with them. They put a restriction on the one going down here. You have to be three hundred feet back from the highway now. And then I suppose the design will be a ✓market *They split up part of* that will have to be in the back end there or something so it won't interfere with anybody. But they had a big fight about that, and they're still going to have a fight when they get into doing it. And they'll put so many restrictions on it, it will be unwise to do it probably. But that's Indian Wells for you.

And Indian Wells, they don't care. They write restrictions very difficult. We found they're wonderful people to work with, but they are so cautious. When we started in here, they didn't know what we were going to do. And this is an oh, very nostalgic piece of property. It was the old Arkell Ranch, and then Ron Moran had it and then it was lovely driving by and seeing all these date trees and so forth. And we had quite a time when we first presented it to them, they were not in favor at all. They didn't know what we were going to do. So I called ✓ Frank *Chilson* one day and I said, Frank, he's a good friend of mine, he's the mayor over there, and I said, Frank, I don't want to go into that if you're going to buck us all the way. So he looked at me and he said, well, he said, I'll tell you what I'll do. He said, if you'll do that like you've always done things and done them well we won't buck you. We'll get behind you. And that's what happened. But at first we had a tough time. But we've tried to do a good job, tried to do everything neatly and quietly and taken our time. And we worked with them very diligently, and that's their fire station down there that you see at the end of our property. They're going to have that, they're going to have their

first tournament there next Friday and Saturday. We're going to have the Cove Country Club, then this one. They're going to have, it's, by paying a hundred and fifty dollars and donate to the fire department, you'll get a chance to play. So we're cooperating with them as much as we can. And we found them very nice. And in the long range, it will be better for both of us because they're going to have a beautiful area here. There's no question about it. They have El Dorado Drive down there. They've always talked about for years coming out of El Dorado and going over to Number Ten, a big corridor, you know, going into the desert. Everybody laughs about that, but now it's a reality. It's coming out of El Dorado. It's beautiful. And we have to put in up to our engines there, and that eventually will go right across this desert and take in all that traffic that comes down 10 instead of going through Palm Springs it will come over this way. That's the, gradually they're developing crossways and bridges across the desert so you can get across there decently without fretting Palm Springs all the time. That's been the big program, problem. They already have Bob Hope Drive and they have, they're going to have Cook Street probably and El Dorado Drive

and maybe Date Palm Drive and several places. So it won't be so bad. Years ago, interesting fact, I attended the, oh, it must be twenty, thirty years ago, I attended a meeting down at the Potter's Hotel down at Indio, and it was threatened by the State Highway Commission, and at that time they were doing advanced planning and they were planning. And they didn't know how many people we were going to have in the desert at that time. No where near what we have now. But they had us all down there to explain what their problem was, and their problem is to move people. And they wanted to make this all a freeway. And, oh, the biggest harangue you ever seen in your life. Everybody was against it. It was going to split all these communities in half. So the State Highway Department at the time said, well, it's up to you folks what you want. But I'm going to tell you something, you're going to be strangulated with traffic one of these days. And that's really what's happened. But they had no idea we were going to have that much growth. But these corridors will help an awful lot coming across the desert. Should come down to Avenue 10 and then come right across to each one of these cities, you'll be in good shape rather than going all the way

down 111. I think eventually that's what will happen.

I'm sure it will.

PY: Rather than, I know earlier they talked about, it might have been the same planning state group, but was talking about rounding the traffic out of Palm Springs and then coming down lower than 111.

JD: They have talked about many things. They were talking eventually, originally of having a parallel road along the wash, parallel to 111, but that's not this. That was not the wise thing to do. Well, there's too much growth now. They couldn't do it anyway. Just like they originally were going to plan, when I was started the golf over here in 1950, and horseback riding was a big thing in those days. They used to ride all over the desert and no restriction. And I told Bill Grant at the time. I said, Bill, I said, you fellows should make me a master plan of your riding trails because the time's going to come when this desert gets sealed up, you won't be able to ride anyplace except the wash and who wants to ride in the wash. So I got the Ohio plan they had back in Ohio and it wasn't a horse plan, it was a bicycle path. And I said, now this is what they do back there. They made a master plan. They have the right of ways all

through everybody's property and everything before the thing is developed which makes sense. You fellows ought to do that with horses. They never did. Well, at that time they were riding up in the hills and they were riding down by several lakes and everything. And now the desert is sealed up, so there's no place to ride. They should have had foresight to get all these bridal paths in before then. When a person was wanting to buy a piece of property, like who bought this, they should *HAVE*

said just wait a minute. Now two seventy-four acres is only two seventy because we got a bridal path goes in here. We would have bought it under those circumstances. But now they're in trouble. I don't know how they're going to work out of it. Just ride down the wash, I guess.

PY: Even that's taken out, I understand.

JD: Yes.

PY: And all places.

JD: Yes. Well, when it rains, that's out of luck. And now they've got the golf courses, you can't ride through the golf course. It's a bad situation. I personally think the horses have seen their great day in the desert. I think they're going to, now you can go over to Tucson and you can go to Albuquerque, and those are real horse

places over there. Big provisions for riding over there. And they don't have the same problems that we have over here or you go to *Alisal* or something like that. But I don't think Palm Springs is the place to ride anymore, really. But now at Las Compadres, they've developed that in the last few weeks, the last few months. That was one of the strong *posts*, Smoketree still has stables.

PY: Right, right.

JD: La Quinta has stables. Now they're going to knock those out because of the new golf course that takes up that area, so there you go again.

PY: You mentioned early on, even before we started the interview, that you had a lot of friends who were old-time ranchers in the area.

JD: Yes. Well, down here one of the, I'll just mention some of the important ones, Ted Brawn, B-R-A-W-N; he's a big manufacturer in Los Angeles, a very successful man who's at Bel Air, has a beautiful estate there. He owned the estate ranch in front of El Dorado and it was just a hobby for him. He used to come down, as I told you. He loved to be with the Mexicans at harvest time. It was a big deal for him. And I've sat on his porch

many a night there and it's gorgeous in the spring of the year. And he just loved it. It was a release for him to get away from Los Angeles and get away from his business. Well, when Ted sold that, it was a sad day. He didn't want to sell, but he had to sell. The desert was moving in around him. And so he went down further, and he liked it so much he went, he tried to duplicate it farther down on the desert. But it never works out when you can't accomplish what you once had. You just can't do it. Well, he was one of the early ones and Cavanagh, Bert Cavanagh, was another one of the early ones. You probably heard his name mentioned. He was a rancher and a date owner and so forth. And he's on committees down here now. But, as I mentioned, Bill ✓ *Rangal* had a ranch down here. He was between Thunderbird and here on Clancey Lane, beautiful little thing. He had that ranch down there. He used to raise some of the most beautiful dates in the desert. These black Medjhool dates they call them, and grapefruit. It was a hobby for him. He was proud to show that ranch to people. And it was a sad day when he, when a development took him out of the picture because he was spending, well, tax money what he was doing. He's taking out all

his money that he made in his real estate business, and putting it into that. And the desert was the great benefactor of that. And one after another those sales. Norm Waters was another one. Came out here from Chicago and he made millions of dollars in the desert. He's an investor. When I was doing Thunderbird, he was investing all over the place here, picking up land and so forth. But he bought a ranch over by Thunderbird there, a date ranch, and he never made a nickel out of it, but he threw his tax money in there. And kept it beautifully, lovely. Then there's a fellow by the name of Manzell that owned all this hundred and sixty acres in front of, a grape ranch in front of El Dorado. Now he sold his because of the profit. I could have bought that land from him for forty-five hundred an acre at one time. Then I was going to sell to Mary Pickford because she wanted to put her home in the center of it and just not have anything around it, just have fun with it. But most of the people that invested in the desert here didn't invest for a profit at all. They put tax money into it or to improve it just for the fun of it, and have fun doing it. And you could name one after another of those people, but it's a sad thing for the desert that that

happened. Alan Ladd, for instance, bought a big piece of property over on Clancey Lane. And beautiful ranch over there, and he, Sue Carroll, his wife, was going to, I've asked her many times if she wants to sell it because I was going to do a project over there. But, no, she just wants to keep it there. In memory of his name and everything. It's just a, you can name one after another of those people, they don't do them for profit. They do them just, Jimmy Malone, that friend of mine, they're doing Chaparral now. He owned that one lane at the end of Clancey Lane. He bought that as a place to, oh, thirty, forty years ago. There was no road out there. He had to take a tractor, a little jeep, and go out to his house out there. He put his house in the middle of that thing, and then he developed land around there he had leveled and checked it and used tax money. And Malone's *Co Edito* in Los Angeles, and he, Uncle Sam paid for it. And he developed a cattle ranch. He fed four hundred cattle there at one time. And then after he got, I guess Uncle Sam figured he wasn't in a legitimate business, so then he decided, well, all those palm trees you see in Palm Springs town are his. Build the airport, and the ones up and down the street that

were already put in, those were all from the Malone ranch. And he had, up until I sold it for him about a few years ago when he was about to die and he wanted me to get rid of it, he, by the way, he and I were raised together back in Wheaton, Illinois, lifelong friends. He had thirty-five hundred date trees to grow about three feet a year. That's where the Chaparral Country Club is today. But he didn't buy that to make money, he bought it to just have a hobby and to do things and to spend his tax money and do. And Bob Hope owned all that property around the Desert Hospitals. And he gave it to the hospital. Well, he probably banked that. He bought that land maybe eight hundred an acre, and he gave it to the hospital and the valuation is ten thousand an acre, so it helped his tax position, and look what it did for the hospital. So that's a very interesting thing that happened in the desert here. We had more people that came to the desert, not to make money, but to invest here because they have a hobby, they have an excuse to come here. You take half the stores in El Paseo down here are not made, people don't start them for the profit venture at all. They do it for just to keep their wife busy or keep them busy or do that that they do. And they

unfortunately the people that do come for business probably lose out, see. You can't compete against a hobby at all. You can't do that. I'm not going to mention any names, but I know thirty or forty of them down there that just, their husband don't give a damn whether they make any money or not. But they're doing what they want to do and they're living in the desert. And they're probably, probably charging them up, I don't know. Everybody has their angles, but there is no place in the world like the desert. I would hate to be an appraiser in the desert and appraise a piece of property because people don't, property is not appraised at what's it worth or what it's producing because a lot of these are hobby deals. And we're very fortunate because that's what makes the desert so beautiful, makes these ranches so beautiful. Half the ranches down in Coachella there, they're the same way. The people buy them for just a hobby and fix them up and keep them beautiful and put their tax money in there. And it's a very strange, it's the only place in the world I know where that happens, right here in this little area.

PY: Does that make this a seasonal . . .

JD: No, that's not so. When I first came here, I'll tell you

a little story, when I first came here to play in that O'Donnell tournament I told you about, and it ended the week, the day after it ended was Easter, always, it was the week before Easter. And Freeman *Gosden* watched me play golf at O'Donnell one time, and he said, "Well, see all these throngs of people around, milling around here just like nothing? And we're playing in the final of the tournament." He said, "Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock you can go out, stand out in the middle of Palm Canyon Drive and take your cannon and shoot it down and you won't hit a person." He said, "That's the way they get out of town so fast." But that was years and years ago. That's fifty, that's thirty years ago. Now today, yesterday if you were around the desert yesterday, we had a tremendous day. You'd wonder where all the people come from. And you go to all the restaurants, they're all packed. They're just jam packed. You can't get a reservation in them. And what has happened, the eastern people go home about April 15 to take care of their taxes. Then we're swarmed with people from the northwest or people from Newport. It gets foggy over at the beach, and they come here. And people from Los Angeles, and there are a lot of sightseers and so forth, but the

desert is not becoming, almost becoming, year round place. And the reason, and as soon as Ernie Hahn does his shopping center, it will be a year round place because he's going to put a covered mall in here and a skating rink and so forth to take care . . . The desert is not too hot to live in; it's too boring. See, years ago when I was first here, when I was doing Thunderbird, the ChiChi was the only restaurant open in the whole Palm Springs. And many nights I used to sit there with Shumann and myself, and just the two of us. And I asked him why he kept open. And he said, "Well, if I close up," he said, "well, people driving across the country and coming through here would have no place to eat or no place to get a drink of water or anything." He said, "They close the whole place up, so" he said, "I'll take it on the chin during the summer." I give ~~Ernest~~ ^{Ernie} Shumann a tremendous amount of credit because he lost an awful lot of money that way. But at that time, during those times, we used to put that, what do you call that all the windows and so forth. It looked like a ghost town. Now some of the projects, we don't even have any restrictions against them. We don't want them to do that anymore. But it's changed now. I would say that

the, if you can get out of here July and August, if you're in pretty good shape, and the average person likes to travel a little bit anyway, and from here you can go up to Idyllwild in forty-five minutes. You can get to Fallbrook in an hour and a half. You can get to San Diego in two hours. You can get to Santa Barbara in a couple of hours. Well, there's no place in the world where you can get out of here if you want to. So your cars are air conditioned and your homes are air conditioned. And it's not a year round city like Phoenix is because Phoenix has all those industries over there. We don't have any industry here. And I doubt if we ever will have. Been talk about getting some smokeless industries here, but I don't think so. I don't think, they'll be a long time. There's little small ones developing, but not many big ones. I'm talking about IBM or Xerox or people like that. They might come in later when there's enough people here that they can find a work force, but they won't come in otherwise. But this is not completely year round yet. It's not like Phoenix is a year round place. That is twelve months of the year. We are, I would say, we are approaching that. We are ten months a year. And most people travel for one

or two months, so they go to do little things, and they come back and forth to watch their property and so forth. But every year I talk to people that leave here and they go on cruise and so forth, and they come back and they say, I'll never do that again. I leave my home and I go up there and it's expensive to travel. It's dangerous to travel. And they said, I'm never going to do that again. I'm going to stay here the rest of the . . . Well, they always go away anyway. But I think they're taking shorter trips. They're satisfied with their own home here for most of the year. And you do, you have your own comforts and so forth. But if you could just get a little change for two months, you'd be all right. It's strange we say that because we, these eastern people come out here, oh, I'd love this sun every day of the year. I say, no, you wouldn't. After you got used to it, you wouldn't. No more than we'd like fog. I go to Toronto. My wife was born and raised there, so I go there once a year and I go there. And the average day in Toronto is about like this. You have two or three weeks of rain or mist or something like this. You never see the sun. No such a thing as seeing the sun anymore. And you'd get as sick as that to go to the sun

city having seen the sun here. Same difference. So we're getting people who crave the sun, and it is nice. It's one of the few places that left, civilized places that are left in the world where you can see the stars at night. Now last night was a beautiful night. Night before was beautiful. And you can't see that many cities today with smog and everything, and we're very fortunate here that most of the time we can. I just mentioned a few of the oldtimers here. I could go on and on and on. There's these ranches where high times were columnar, they're all, they originally fought the developments. When we acquired the El Dorado and had acquired it, they were shocked and they were just amazed that they weren't brought into the negotiations because here they're sitting next to El Dorado with the wonderful ranch and leading the life of Riley, they're all get together with their parties and so forth and their song fests and harvesting time and everything, and then we come in there with a new development and knock out one of the biggest pieces of property. So, and they knew they were going to so their taxes went up on their property and they knew we were going to sell their property sooner or later, so they really resented it. They fought it for a short

length of time. But they didn't like it at all when we came in here. I would say that the average person of the desert resented the golf coming in here to begin with. Because we were really building it for outsiders. We were building it for people from Chicago, from Denver, and New York, Kansas City and that started a big movement to the desert. And it's been a good thing for the desert. That's where all the people built big homes, invested things and so forth. And that started a big movement. It wasn't the local people. But it's the same old story if a person has something they love and then to see something destroyed, it's pretty tough to take. I was on the other side, too. I didn't blame them. I was sort of in a on A ISLAND myself. But I knew we had to have progress, so I've taken the attitude, well, let's do it the best we can then. Make it beautiful and make . . . We have the best backdrops in the world here in the desert. These mountains are gorgeous. And I'm very pleased that they haven't developed those because they're black at night and they look, and they're like a stage setting. So people say, don't you think it's difficult to do these? How do you visualize these projects? Well, the easiest thing in the world is like a stage. You just

build your backdrops while you're there. So it's up to you to sort of use them for your scenery and everything and do, you're just developing the ground below it. So that's all right. But it's a fascinating place. I'll tell you, when people, I look back at El Dorado, for instance, and I just mention that as one, and Eisenhower goes here, and Adenhowe goes here, and the Japanese premiere goes there. And every important personage in the world ends up there during his time of hearing. And the same thing is happening over at Tamarisk. The same thing is happening over at Bermuda Dunes. And I don't care where you go. Any good club attracts the top people of the world there. There's no question about it. Now if Ronald Reagan happened to be at Thunderbird one day, and then all of his friends, and then Ford's, they'll be in there from now on. It just seems to attract those people and they attract others. That probably has a lot to do with these movie people, too. Had Frank Sinatra and people like that had lots to do with it. But it's very interesting. I happened to be at El Dorado the night that Adenhowe, Conrad Adenhowe, came in there and funniest thing I ever seen. We had the tent fair. They
one of
were out in front of/the cottages he was saying. And he

just took a chair and he just moved right out in the middle of the fair. It was just like he moved out there. And I thought the funniest sight I've ever seen in my life because he was sitting in the middle of a fair. He'd just look under the palm trees and look at the ceiling around, and he thought it was the most beautiful fruit he had ever seen. So that did my heart good to see him sitting out there in the middle of the fair all by himself. It was a panic. And then the Japanese students all came over there when Eisenhower. They had a meeting with Eisenhower because he'd had some trouble with them, you know, over there. And they came over to apologize. And they had a meeting over there and I happened to be there at the time. And I think the most fascinating thing in doing these projects is you don't go after those people to come there. They eventually show up there. And that's not just true of El Dorado, it's true of all the places.

✓ PY: How about Marrakesh? How did that come about?

✓ JD: Marrakesh was, the Marrakesh piece of property was a hundred and fifty-five acres. And it was an old ranch there never developed. They started to develop the water, put a big water tank in the top of it, and then

a big water line down there. And they built one ranch building and dug a well, one of the biggest wells in the desert. And then the owner passed away, so it was put up for auction. And at that time, Cliff Henderson was doing most of Palm Desert. And he appeared at the auction for Leonard Firestone, his partner, and they were going to buy it at real low, low price. Well, when the auctioneer was hammering the thing down and going, going, going, up jumps the fellow in the back of the room by the name of Ed Stewart, owned the Catalina swimsuit people, swimsuit company. And he outbid them. It was a complete shock to Cliff Henderson. At the time, Cliff said, well, give me, said to the auctioneer, he said, give me time to go call Leonard Firestone. Now he wouldn't give him time. He said, this is a sale. So he bought it for almost nothing. And he had it for years and years and years. Then all of a sudden she, Elizabeth, his wife, put up a sign on the property. She was wanting to get rid of it. But she wouldn't sell for anything less than cash for it. At that time Palm Desert was in the doldrums. Half the stores were opened. They weren't doing anything at all. I came along one day and helped them go into El Dorado. And I happened to see the

sign up there for sale. And so I called up Elizabeth and asked her about the price and everything. And she said, well, you'll have to go through this lady, Fern Cole, who was a broker friend of hers, which I did. And she said, no, she would only ~~me to~~ sell the property for cash. Well, a hundred and fifty-five acres, and she wanted fifteen thousand dollars an acre. At that time was a tremendous price. So I finally talked her into, I didn't have any money, so I talked her into leasing the thing on a long-term basis, so that I wouldn't have to put out any money to begin with. And she finally agreed to that. I told her I had a plan for it. At the time, I said, Elizabeth, you can't sell that to anybody, and if you break it up, you'll ruin it. So let me do a plan for it. Let me do, I know what I want to do with it. So we talked back and forth for a couple of months. And she finally said, oh, go ahead. And I wrote the lease, and it's been a very, very, very lucrative deal for her. She gets about, she gets almost a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, and it keeps going up all the time, for sixty-seven years. And she will leave it to her children, so forth, but it's been a very beautiful project, and very interesting to do. Then, of course,

after I made the initial plan for it and everything, I had to get my investing group. So I got the same people that invested at Seven Lakes and presented it to them. And they, after haggling for it for a few months, they went to Chicago and they signed it up and we started with very, practically no money, only three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And that was what I call poor boying the deal. When you don't have any money, you learn how to do things. So that's been a very, very, very successful deal, probably the most successful deal in the whole desert per dollar invested.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1:

JD: The interesting thing to me about all these developments, you know, you go into a very out of the way place and if you put in a successful project, then you have all the other developers watching what you're doing and they come and they get on your, it's like baracles on a ship. They come and they attach themselves to a unit. They say, well, if he's successful, we can do something better and be successful, too. So that was very true at Marrakesh because we were up there by ourselves when that happened. Palm Desert was really in the doldrums. I took a survey

right at that time, and I tried to get my investors to invest in all those little vacant stores in El Paseo and so forth. Along the main streets, just nothing. You could have bought anything for nothing, but they wouldn't do it. I said, you can make more money in that than you can on Marrakesh, but then as soon as we started Marrakesh, everything went boom, boom, boom, boy, just went sky-high.

PY: When was this, sixty?

JD: Oh, I'd say Marrakesh is about ten years old now, in there. And you couldn't sell anything in Palm Desert in those days. I made a survey of the whole city, took me six months. I had a fellow work for me and he made a survey of all the vacant lots and everything. And you could buy a house for nothing. And I finally got, I talked to my architect into buying two or three houses and a lot of vacant lot. Lot of vacant property there, just sell it for nothing pretty near. It was a shame they didn't do that, but anyway, then after Marrakesh got started and people could see it was going to be a success, they jumped in there and built this and that. And just all around it and all over the place. And then Ironwood came in after that, but that happened when I was

doing Thunderbird. Same thing happened. See, they could, you could buy land at Thunderbird for five hundred an acre at that time. And now it's enormous. But the smart people sit on it like a big hawk sitting in a pool and they wait for you to make a start. Then they analyze it whether it's going to be successful. And we have them coming in here every day and I can tell them a mile away. They come in and ask you questions, and they're just analyzing it and analyzing it and analyzing. Now they're scared to death today. They wouldn't be interested if I'd come down, so they're not so sure. The speculators are gone out of the desert pretty fast now because the prices are so high today. But years ago it was a speculative market. A smart man would come from, well, for instance, we had these Canadians come down here from Toronto or so forth or Vancouver. And they were, they'd buy property along Rancho Mirage and say a thousand dollars a front foot. And up in Canada that's twice that much or three times that much. So they think that we're cheap down here. But, so they watch it and then they invest when they feel like it. It's amazing the number of Canadians that are in the desert here. And, of course, today the

Canadian dollar is only eighty-two cents against ours. So they're taking a tremendous beating for anything they buy down here. They're about eighteen percent, so you can just add that on to what, if they bought one of these houses here at three hundred thousand, that's eighteen percent over that. is what they're paying for it. But they're doing it anyway.

PY: Fortunately for us.

JD: But the market I've been watching very carefully is the Hawaiian Island market. And the sad thing that's happening there today is that this is offering these ridiculously low fares. You can go to Honolulu for sixty-five dollars, but he doesn't tell you what you do when you get there. Now your rooms are, the Hawaiian Islands are becoming the most expensive place. They're still cheaper than Europe, but they're very expensive. You take a hundred dollars a day for a room, and then your golf and everything. You're spending two hundred fifty to three hundred dollars a day. But you're in Honolulu. If you're over there on a cheap fare, so it's not fair, it's really not fair because people are sort of dumb. They don't realize what . . . that getting from here to England is one thing, and getting back to the mainland

is another thing. And same with France. All these cheap fares don't mean a thing to me. It means what you have to pay when you get over there. So I think people are going to travel less. And the average hotel bill now is around a hundred dollars a day. And any resort, and then there's your golf on top of that is sixty dollars. And for you and your wife. And then your meals and whatever your entertainment and so forth, so it's costing around two hundred dollars a day and most people are going to analyze it and say, well, I'll stay home rather than, I've got more comfort at home anyway. So that's one thing that influenced us with this building here. See, these are all built for all-year living, and built very massive. And they're not weekend places at all because we think there's going to be a big change in the next year in how people are going to be forced to live, and how they're going to want to live. Because the average person that isn't in business is retired and so forth, he's got to watch his dollars so much, and there's only so much they can spend. And I don't think you could get more luxuriant living than here in the desert and staying in a nice and comfortable place than you can, much better than traveling around and living

in a dinky little room someplace.

PY: You say they're massive, how big are the houses?

JD: These are very massive. We're in Indian Wells, number one. And they won't let you build anything less than two thousand feet, so we decided that we would build a real all-year place here, very heavy, very heavy beams and big solid cement roof and a lot of stump rock sides and overhangs and solar bounded windows. And a place you could have for all-year living. And nice garage and so forth. So we have really probably built, I would say, in advance of most people. We've tried to think it out, how are we going to have to live in three years from now? Maybe we're not going to have as much gasoline, maybe we're not going to have enough power. Now I see the Edison Company comes out every day now and says, "Well, it might cost you fifty cents more," which it might. Now so we feel that we don't want to get caught in the trap. And Marrakesh, I wouldn't do that today because Marrakesh had no overhangs. We had a French architect. And the sun blasts in those windows up there. And today we have to use a lot more, lot less glass than they use. We no longer, you see this room here, now if this was Marrakesh, you'd

come all the way, in fact, you'd have ten foot ceilings. Then you'd come all the way over there with your wall here. We've cut that down so we cut it down so you don't spoil the view at all, but we've put the big overhangs here so you can lounge out there without the sun blasting in, hitting in those windows. You learn how to live here. I've offset mine at Marrakesh by using shutters and things like that. And I close them up for the day, but it took me a few years to learn that. It's going back to the old Mexican way of living, I think. Where they shut themselves up in the . . . We're trying to sell view and at the same time we've got to be very careful that we don't let that sun blast in and make these houses hot. We put big insulation in them and so we've done everything we could. We're thinking ahead three or four or five years. And sometimes it hurts you. Sometimes maybe you're not, maybe you shouldn't be that far ahead, but we figured this is a long-range project and we'd rather do it that way. I'm very happy with it.

PY: It's certainly beautiful here.

JD: We're still pioneering a little bit here, but this fall we'll have the clubhouse finished. We'll have that

finished in July 31st and then we're going to take about two months to decorate it and landscape it. And by November 1st, we should be having our operation as it should be. Private club and good members and waterfalls all going and entrance going and everything, be a nice place to ride a bicycle and to walk around at night.

PY: Well, it's lovely. I think I've probably taken up an enormous amount of your time.

JD: That's all right. Mention a lot of the wonderful ranch owners around through here, but I think that's, I think that . . .

PY: Wasn't there another ranch next to here, it used to be that Leisure World, not Leisure World,

JD: Well, there was the Manzo Ranch which was in front. Then there was the, and that was sold to Ben Swagg and to a group from San Francisco, and they still own that. And that's where Lewis Homes are being built on a part of it there now. And that's where the new shopping center is going, by the way, too.

PY: Oh, a shopping center

JD: I don't know too much about . . . What's that?

PY: The shopping center is on this side of 111.

JD: No, it's on that side.

PY: Oh.

JD: It's on the corner of 111 and, it's on the southwest corner of 111 and El Dorado Drive.

PY: I see.

JD: It backs right through those homes I haven't paid too much attention to the development out there. I've paid more attention to here. See, Delores Opal owns a nice piece of property down here, just beyond the city hall, by Waldon there. She has a hundred acres. She's had that for years and years. She bought it for her children, and he's had a very wonderful record of buying property. He just buys and then he doesn't develop them, so he's had a clean record. The government never gets after because he buys and then keeps it for years and then sells. He's not a developer or anything. So Bob has made, oh, I guess he made three or four hundred million dollars in property all over southern California. But she bought that property when it was probably five or six hundred dollars an acre, or eight hundred dollars an acre, and she's held it all these years. And the Flood Control came along here. It's right across from the Flood Control came along here and they needed some land, so they wanted to level

it for her. And she finally allowed them to level it. And she's got a piece of land as level as this now, and a hundred acres. And it's worth about, oh, forty, sixty thousand dollars an acre. It's left to her children. Pretty clever. Then Desi Arnaz in the early days built the Indian Wells Hotel. You know that. And he was one of the early Thunderbird people. He and Lucille Ball. And we had a lot of fun with them there. But they're looking around for investment to do things and so forth. So he built that. And then the Hotel was acquired by a McMillan, built by McMillan Mortgage Company. And then Fritz Brim bought it. And some other people own it, then Fritz Brim bought it from them. Now he's just sold it recently. His estate sold it. But they . . . I think a lot of people buy, as I said, they buy property here for their, just to be doing something. And to be excuse to take trips out here and look and so forth. from Chicago. And that's where the tax annual comes in. And then they get little groups together and they build something or do something, and they don't care whether they make money or not. And they hold a few. Then if they don't make money, they have to divest themselves of it. So then they pick it up and some other fellow does

the same thing. Then he'll do it. So it's an interesting sort of a hopscotch and jump game. But it's been good for the desert. It's beautified the desert where it wouldn't have been beautified otherwise. If it was strictly on the profit basis, the desert would still be the desert. It wouldn't be all these beautiful projects. Now today that's changed. These people that are in here now on all these projects are in there for the profit motive. They're not doing it for tax angles. They're not doing it help anybody. They're just doing it . . . they see an opportunity.

PY: In what? You mean in these?

JD: In all these new developments, you see on the desert now. Those are not what I'm talking about, the early days of . . . there are building companies that come in here from all over and they're in there to make a profit. Pure and simple. They're not doing . . . Oh, once in a while there's a commercial venture that, there's a doctor friend of mine, get a group together, want to do something out by the desert hospital. That would be partly business and partly a tax angle deal. So, but there's very few of those today. I haven't helped you much in your historical society, I guess. The planning

commissions, they have their favorite piece of property for the, the piece of property they think is going to effect their future so they're overly cautious of what you're going to do with that property. Now they won't know in advance what you're going to do with it. They don't know if we're going to put waterfalls out in front. They don't know where, they insisted that you save the dates and things like that. They know that. But they don't know how you're going to save them. And they don't know what kind of a golf course you're going to build, what kind of a project you're going to build. So it does set, if you do something good it sets the example for other things that they have to okay. They say, now do, these fellows do it like, we want you to do it a little bit like, oh, their entrance or we want you to do it a little bit like they're save the palm trees or we want you, we do the low, lowering houses, we don't want any two-stories or we don't want them over two thousand square feet. They can point to that then. Which is an important thing, I think.

PY: Well.

JD: There's a lot of big companies in the planning board that are coming into the desert here. And they're very substantial. They've got a lot of money, and they're not

going to do things in a point of view.

They're going to do it to make money, and . . .

END OF INTERVIEW